

**Written statement before  
the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on  
Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs**

**The Honorable Max Cleland  
Secretary, American Battle Monuments Commission**

**December 9, 2014**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee...

On behalf of our Chairman General Tony McPeak and our Board of Commissioners, I thank you for this opportunity to discuss the mission, operations and programs of the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Since 1923, our purpose has not changed—to commemorate the service and achievements of America's armed forces, yet our methods have changed. We execute our mission by creating memorials worldwide where U.S. forces have served, and by administering 25 overseas military cemeteries—shrines to our fallen and those that fought by their side.

We do this with the words of our first Chairman, General of the Armies John J. Pershing ever in mind. General Pershing's words serve as the foundation statement for all that we do:

*"Time will not dim the glory of their deeds"*

The cemeteries and memorials we administer have been entrusted to our care by the American people—we take that as a solemn responsibility. For the first 80 years of our history, ABMC's principle focus was to maintain our commemorative sites to the highest of standards. That remains and always will be our core mission—the war dead we honor deserve nothing less.

2014 has proven to be a significant commemorative year for the Nation and for our Commission. We were honored to host President Obama at three of the Commission's overseas cemeteries this fiscal year: Flanders Field American Cemetery in Belgium; Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines; and Normandy American Cemetery, France.

At Normandy on June 6<sup>th</sup>, the president was joined by French President Hollande, Secretary of State Kerry, Secretary of Defense Hagel, Congressional delegations, and many other civilian and military dignitaries to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D-Day landings. Before an audience of 10,000, including more than 300 D-Day veterans, the President reflected on the historical significance of June 6, 1944:

“We come to tell the story of the men and women who did it so that it remains seared into the memory of a future world. We tell this story for the old soldiers who pull themselves a little straighter today to salute brothers who never made it home. We tell the story for the daughter who clutches a faded photo of her father, forever young; for the child who runs his fingers over colorful ribbons he knows signify something of great consequence, even if he doesn’t yet fully understand why.”

Unlike the *Longest Day* 70 years ago, it was a beautiful June day in Normandy to remember the achievement and sacrifice of the more than 10,000 brave souls buried in the hallowed Normandy grounds and memorialized on the cemetery’s Tablets of the Missing.

Other significant commemorative events this past year included the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Operation Market Garden at Netherlands American Cemetery and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Operation Dragoon at Rhone American Cemetery in southern France.

Not long after these World War II events concluded, attention shifted in August to the World War I Centennial. Although the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States entry into the Great War will not begin until April 2017, the Commission’s eight World War I cemeteries in Europe will receive increased attention as visitors travel to the battlefields where the fathers and mothers of the “Greatest Generation” witnessed unprecedented devastation and death; places where American sacrifice ultimately opened an American Century.

I have shared with you previously the ambitious visitor center projects we began as part of our Interpretation Program—what we now refer to as Telling Their Story. I’m pleased to report this morning that two new visitor centers at our Cambridge and Sicily-Rome cemeteries were dedicated on Memorial Day, and the renovated visitor center at the Pointe du Hoc Ranger Monument—just nine kilometers from Normandy cemetery—was dedicated June 5<sup>th</sup> on the eve of D-Day.

Visitor center renovation projects at two World War I cemeteries—Meuse-Argonne in France and Flanders Field in Belgium—are in design. And three additional visitor center projects are in various stages of development:

- at our Honolulu Memorial in the Department of Veterans Affairs National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific—the Punchbowl;
- at Manila American Cemetery, our only World War II commemorative cemetery in the Pacific; and,
- at the World War I Chateau-Thierry Monument in France, located about one hour east of Paris.

We also have two new monuments in development.

- A monument to be placed at Midway Island has been designed and fabricated, and installation is forthcoming.
- We launched a competition to select an architect to design a U.S. monument for New Zealand's national memorial park in Wellington, responding to an invitation from the Government of New Zealand.

These monument projects are part of an initiative launched by our Board of Commissioners, with the counsel of the military service historians, to honor significant battles and achievements of U.S. forces that have not previously been commemorated by the Commission.

Closer to home, we partnered with the National Park Service to renovate and upgrade kiosks and educational content at the World War II and Korean War memorials on the National Mall, significantly enhancing the visitor experience. Particularly popular is the ability for visitors to access ABMC's World War II Registry and Korean War Honor Roll databases at the kiosks.

We are strengthening our collaboration with Arlington National Cemetery, defining opportunities to share best practices and training. We can learn much from the technological advances ANC has made in recent years, and we can share the core competencies for which our agency has become known, strengthening both organizations. Likewise, we continue our long-standing relationship with the National Cemetery Administration through advisory committees and our shared interest in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, home of our Honolulu Memorial. Through such collaborations we have the opportunity, collectively, to improve the efficiency of our operations and more effectively serve our stakeholders.

Phase two of the Commission's education program initiative has begun with the award of a contract to a joint venture of National History Day and the George Mason University Center for History and New Media to create a World War II-focused, education program developed by teachers that will help students better understand the service, experience and sacrifice of American armed forces that served and died during the war in Northern Europe.

Products related to World War I, developed in partnership with the University of North Carolina and Virginia Tech as phase one of our education program, will be completed by the end of this year.

The Commission received a new mission responsibility in fiscal year 2014 with completion in December 2013 of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. and the Republic of the Philippines, giving ABMC the ability to restore and maintain Clark Veterans Cemetery in the Philippines as ABMC's 25<sup>th</sup> cemetery. The action was

contemplated by the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act (Public Law 112-260), signed into law by President Obama in January 2013. Our staff at Manila American Cemetery began basic maintenance of the cemetery immediately upon signature of the MOU, as well as, restoration of the perimeter fence and construction of a temporary equipment storage facility. We are awaiting the completion of an engineering assessment of the physical condition of the cemetery and expect initial results this month. We will carefully analyze those results to develop recommendations regarding appropriate next steps that will guide future restoration plans, long-term maintenance requirements, and budget requests beginning in the fiscal year 2017 budget cycle.

Although ABMC's core mission remains unchanged, in order that we appropriately continue to honor our Nation's fallen, we have found it essential to place emphasis on "telling the story" of these brave men and women. As we find ourselves further in time from the seminal events we commemorate, it is critical that we provide context for younger generations of Americans who have little understanding of why their fellow Americans rest in the soil of England, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, or the Philippines.

Our visitor centers at Normandy, Cambridge, Sicily-Rome and Pointe du Hoc, and the projects underway or planned, have inestimable value in enabling understanding of the historical events surrounding the "the glory of their deeds" and the placement of these cemeteries. As such, we are re-invigorating our strategic plan to set forth a path focused on better supporting this essential mission. In addition to our standing mission and vision, inspired by General Pershing's foundational statement; and our core values of excellence, integrity, stewardship, commitment and respect; we have codified a new set of guiding principles. These principles were designed to help fill a void in our educational and historical preservation activities, along with informing our new interpretive services program:

*We will Tell their Story*

We will preserve, communicate, and interpret the stories of competence, courage and sacrifice of those we honor, while providing historical context for why our commemorative sites were established, the men and women we honor, and the values for which they fought and died. Recognizing the changing demographics of our audiences, we will pursue opportunities at our sites and through education programs and emerging technologies to educate and inform our audiences in a way that evokes a lasting, personal connection.

*We will Preserve our Heritage Assets*

We will protect and maintain our commemorative sites to their original design intent and to exceptional standards. ABMC commemorative sites are completed works of civic art that reflect the Nation's perpetual commitment to the service and sacrifice honored within them. The horticultural features defined by the original landscape architects are integral to these sites. They will be maintained in a manner that enhances a sense of awe and tranquility and that reflect their status as important heritage assets.

We will use noble materials to preserve and maintain the structural features of our sites to a “like new” standard that appropriately honors those for whom they were erected. We will plan and execute infrastructure projects that support stewardship and preservation, actively seeking traditional craftsmen and trades, while evaluating state of the art techniques, technology and products that produce the same results.

*We will Develop our Cultural and Historical Resources*

We will actively collect and document archival, photographic, and dimensional materials that enhance scholarship in and interpretation of our mission and our heritage assets. To facilitate management of these assets at the highest professional levels, we will maintain a thoughtful, clear and relevant scope of collections policy and a collection management plan, and routinely document our historical property, allowing us to learn and share critical information with the public and our stakeholders. We will engage in comprehensive planning, including all aspects of collections management. These management activities will focus on professional standards and concepts of inventory, assessment, treatment and management, specifically targeted to areas of Heritage Assets Management such as architecture, landscape architecture, archival and museum sciences, material science, forensic archeology, anthropology and related fields.

These guiding principles will clarify our decision making and shape our way forward as a world class public history organization. When fully developed, our new strategic plan will signal a significant pivot in mission emphasis for the American Battle Monuments Commission.

As we move toward 2020, we will continue our emphasis on maintaining the highest standard for our memorials and cemeteries, while providing a first class visitor education experience at each of our sites.

In conclusion, I invite each of you to visit our commemorative sites on your future travels, to see for yourselves our stewardship of the resources provided to the Commission to execute the responsibilities assigned to us by the Administration and the Congress.